

CITY OF ROCKVILLE

WHITE-TAILED DEER CONTROL POLICY

I. OBJECTIVE

The objective of the white-tailed deer policy is to develop a criteria to manage the increasing impact of white-tailed deer on public and private lands within the limits of the City of Rockville.

II. OVERVIEW

Toward the end of 1995, the citizens of Rockville began to express concerns about the rising white-tailed deer population. Of primary concern is the destruction of landscape plants and vegetable gardens.

The white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) are extremely adaptable, beautiful creatures whose ecological role is changing. Deer are native to this region, preferring the edges of woodland and brush areas that provide good cover. Landscape trees and shrubs provide high nutrition sources, as do native sources of browse, such as tree sprouts and seedlings. Thus, homeowners usually experience the greatest amount of damage near these areas.

Currently, the City believes that problems may be due to deer being an overburden nuisance; not an overpopulation.

Surveys should be pursued to compile pertinent information concerning the white-tailed deer population in and around the City of Rockville. This information, along with other types of monitoring, will be used to identify specific areas of impact.

III. CONCERNS

The primary concerns of increasing white-tailed deer populations include:

Deer Vehicle Incidents

Deer vehicle incidents have been reported on Norbeck Road (Route 28) and Wootton Parkway. Deer vehicle incidents, as reported, are on the rise.

Browsing of Landscape Plantings and Vegetable Gardens

White-tailed deer will browse on a wide variety of plant material, much of which can be found in the home landscape. Browsing can cause considerable damage, such as deformed shape or death to desirable plants, and antler rubbing by bucks can damage trees and shrubs by creating entry points for insects and disease.

Lyme Disease

Lyme disease is an infectious illness that is transmitted to animals and humans by the bite of the deer tick (*Ixodes daminni*). There is evidence that suggests that an increase in the deer population can cause an increase in the number of ticks within that population.

Damage to Natural Areas

An overabundance of deer can have a detrimental effect on native vegetation, forest regeneration, and wildlife habitat. Areas of extreme overpopulation may begin to show a "browse line"; where, even in mid-summer, there is little vegetation on the forest floor and trees and shrubs look like they have been neatly "clipped" of all leaves up to about five feet high. When this happens, young trees cannot develop and habitats for nesting forest birds and other wildlife are destroyed, i.e., the Shapiro tract.

IV. POLICY STATEMENT

The City of Rockville will practice **an attitude of tolerance and co-existence for deer** activity as part of the City's natural environment and **will foster this attitude** among the public through education.

Wildlife is a part of our common wealth. All citizens benefit from common ownership, while at the same time assuming **a shared responsibility for wildlife's well-being.** In its role as the primary steward of the City's natural resources, the Department of Recreation and Parks recognizes that deer are a natural and desirable component of the environment because they contribute to the quality and diversity of natural habitat. Conflicts arise when deer activity impacts public areas, public health and safety, and private property.

The significance of the impact will determine what resolution action, if any, will be taken to reduce or eliminate conflict.

Generally, where efforts are made to reduce conflict with wildlife, the most effective methods are those of exclusion; measures which deny wildlife the food or shelter which it seeks. **It is the responsibility of private property owners to take reasonable steps to exclude problem wildlife from their land.** In the case of deer, these are steps which make the landscaping unattractive or unavailable. Private property owners should consider the following:

- Repellents
- Exclusion
- Electric fences
- Use of resistant or undesirable plants

V. MANAGEMENT OF THE WHITE-TAILED DEER**Definition**

White-tailed deer management consists of all actions undertaken by the City for the express purpose of manipulating deer populations and/or resolving conflicts of deer activity, whether those actions are initiated by staff or are in response to public inquiries. It also includes any other action that may directly or indirectly impact deer.

For management purposes, deer activity that results in conflict will be evaluated by the City for the existence of, or potential for:

- Impact to public health and safety

- Impact to private property
- Impact to public parks and facilities.

The significance of these impacts will determine the type of management action taken, but all actions will follow established conflict resolution procedures. Deer management actions will be based on the following:

- Proven wildlife management techniques
- Appropriate animal welfare concerns
- Problem solving
- Applicable laws and regulations.

Under City of Rockville law, Section 14-37, the white-tailed deer is protected as a wild animal against harm or destruction on public property. In addition, legal responsibility for resident wildlife, including white-tailed deer, is vested with the State of Maryland through public law (Maryland Annotated Code 10-202 and 10-205). The Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division, provides for deer population management through harvest regulations, which are implemented by establishing the length of hunting season, permitted weapons, bag limits, and sex of deer to be harvested. Currently, there is no hunting allowed within the corporate limits of Rockville without the proper permits issued by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

For each type of deer activity, the City will develop procedures as follows:

- Public education (see attached brochure - Protecting Gardens From Deer Damage)
- Exclusion; including, but not limited to fence and screens
- Population management; including, but not limited to birth control and euthanasia, as applicable to State law

Supervisory Management

All white-tailed deer conflict actions will be reported and recorded by the City.

- The Neighborhood Services Department shall monitor complaints about nuisance deer and deer/vehicle incidents. This office will make available information specific to these complaints, as well as carrying out the management tactics.
- The Recreation and Parks Department shall assist the Neighborhood Services Department with the collection of data and the monitoring of effects of the white-tailed deer on parks and natural areas, and coordination with area-wide deer control plans and procedures.

Memo of Understanding

The Montgomery County Government has formed a task force to develop the "Comprehensive Management Plan for White-Tailed Deer in Montgomery County, Maryland"; which, when adopted, may provide assistance to the City. Therefore, the City of Rockville should request cooperation in partnership from the State and the designated

agencies/departments of Montgomery County, including the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, to identify and initiate appropriate actions to counter problems. The City of Rockville should pursue a "Memo of Understanding" between the City, Montgomery County, and the State of Maryland as part of this cooperative effort in the management of the white-tailed deer

Professional Assistance

The City shall contract with an expert wildlife biologist, with white-tailed deer conflict resolution experience, to assist in the overall objectives of the White-Tailed Deer Control Policy for the City of Rockville, or shall utilize appropriate Department of Natural Resources assistance

VI. METHODOLOGY

All public concerns about deer activity creating conflicts will be first investigated in the field by City staff using the methodology below:

- Deer activity will be evaluated on an on-going basis for potential of conflict/impact in the urban environment
- Complainants, adjacent landowners, and homeowners/civic associations where they exist, will be informed immediately of policies and procedures regarding the management of deer.
- Interpretive brochures covering deer management and City management policy and procedures will be made available to adjacent landowners, and homeowners/civic associations where they exist.
- The significance of these impacts will determine the type of management taken, but all actions will follow established conflict resolution procedures.
- In the case of impacts to private property, the property owner will be counseled to accommodate the deer and tolerate some inconvenience. Interpretive information will be provided as mentioned above, as well as information on exclusion methods. For deer, exclusion methods typically involve eight-foot-tall fencing, baited electric fence, repellents, and use of landscape plants not desirable to deer. Citizens must implement specified exclusion measures, where practical, before other actions will be considered. The City shall provide consultation services, as needed. The City shall assume **no** legal liability for these impacts.
- In situations where exclusion measures are not feasible on private property, the City may take actions on municipal parkland in order to address significant impacts on private property. Such actions will follow established conflict resolution procedures, beginning with exclusion and proceeding through removal of the deer.
- In the case of impacts to public areas, the City may decide to take management actions to protect resources. However, damage to trees, shrubs, and other plants on

parkland, in the absence of other impacts, does not necessarily constitute reason for management. In order to determine overall impacts to natural resources, a field investigation of habitat suitability may be conducted.

- If it is determined that the habitat is suitable for a fixed number of deer, the City may implement population control, if practical, to limit the populations. If this is not practical, the City will follow established conflict resolution procedures, beginning with exclusion, and ending with the removal of the deer.
- If the habitat is found to be unsuitable, and if exclusion methods fail or are infeasible, or if a safety threat persists, population management actions will be taken as described below. Whatever type of action is taken, it will be conducted in as humane a manner as possible, with due regard for wildlife habitat welfare.
- Citizen complainants, adjacent landowners, and homeowner/civic associations where they exist, will be notified of impending population management actions by the City.

VII. CONTROL PLAN

The following recommended actions require consultation with the State of Maryland, Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, and Montgomery County before they are implemented

Trapping and Removal/Relocation

This alternative would provide for the live capture and relocation of deer, out of areas in which they pose problems, to other predetermined locations.

Concerns

Live capture and relocation would be labor intensive, would in all likelihood have to be undertaken annually in order to be effective, and would be costly. Deer populations elsewhere are high, and finding suitable habitat into which deer could be relocated without effecting established herds would, at this time, be unlikely. Physiological trauma and deer mortality in capture and handling would be unavoidable, and predicted loss of transported animals after relocation would be high.

Repellents and Scare Devices

A variety of chemical (taste, odor) and mechanical (noise or visual alarm) devices have been tested, and under some conditions they have proven effective in repelling deer from the areas in which they are undesired.

Concerns

Extensive literature exists on this subject and many repellents are readily available. The downfall of repellents are that they are not effective in all situations, can be costly, may require frequent reapplication, and may diminish in effectiveness as deer adapt to them.

Fencing or Physical Exclusion

Fencing or other barriers can be highly effective in providing permanent protection to resources threatened by deer or by preventing deer from accessing areas where they are

not desired.

Concerns

Small screens can be effective where protection of individual plants is needed. In natural areas, small fenced plots could protect rare plant species and encourage their reproduction, but the fences would have to be permanently installed unless the density of deer is decreased.

Initiate Use of Contraceptives

The use of contraceptives falls into four basic categories: oral contraceptives, implantation of microencapsulated hormones, surgical sterilization, and immunosterilization (the use of contraceptive vaccines).

Concerns

There are numerous complications involved; such as the need for frequent application to achieve physiological effectiveness, the need to capture and handle animals, the need for precise annual timing in administering contraceptives, and the current cost of contraceptive programs. There is also the potential for liability relating to consumption of meat from animals treated with contraceptives and from exposure of the public to unrecovered delivery devices; e.g., darts which miss their target and contain viable product.

Direct Reduction

This alternative involves the use of specially tested and permitted shooters through controlled hunt or other management action to remove deer from areas where hunting is presently not allowed or permitted.

Concerns

Implementation of recommended actions would require coordination with Natural Resources and enforcement agencies for the State of Maryland, Montgomery County, and the City. While other parts of the country use this technique, the City would require careful analysis before implementation.

VIII. POLICY DECISIONS

White-tailed deer conflict action plan decisions will be made by the White-Tailed Deer Control Committee (WDCC):

- City Horticulturist
- Neighborhood Services Representative
- Member of the Recreation and Parks Advisory Board

Severe conflicts that cannot be decided by the WDCC will be referred to the Recreation and Parks Advisory Board for decision and action authorization.

IX. ADMINISTRATION AND AUTHORIZATION

The White-Tailed Deer Control Policy will be administered by the Director of Recreation and Parks with authority provided by the adoption of this policy by the Recreation and

Parks Advisory Board. The White-Tailed Deer Control Policy shall also be subject to periodic review by the Recreation and Parks Advisory Board.